

VZCZCXRO8294
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2520/01 2240833
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 110833Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8769
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002520

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: REPERCUSSIONS OF PROVINCIAL ELECTION DELAY

REF: BAGHDAD 2464

BAGHDAD 00002520 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: POL MinCouns Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Parliament's recess August 6 without passing a provincial election law makes provincial elections unlikely before the end of 2008. Based on discussions with Iraqi contacts (including extensive input from PRTs), it is clear that many Iraqis were disappointed but not surprised. The parliamentary antics will feed a sense of public detachment from the political process. A delay will particularly disadvantage Sunnis who boycotted the 2005 provincial elections, but who want to participate in provincial elections this time around. Many Iraqis, both Shi'a and Sunni, suspect that incumbent politicians conspired to delay elections out of fear that their parties would fare poorly. Council of Representatives (CoR) members who opposed compromise were able to tap into a deep desire among Iraqi Arabs to thwart perceived Kurdish intentions to annex Kirkuk. While we do not expect violence in the short term, it is clear that Sunni leaders in provinces such as Anbar, Fallujah and Salah ad-Din are unhappy and assessing the situation. In managing the issue it is critical that the CoR resume negotiations expeditiously to put elections back on track. This will ensure that those who have abandoned violence remain committed to the political process. End Summary.

Sunni Hopes Clash with Perceived Kurdish Overreach

[¶2.](#) (C) In general, Iraqi Sunnis view provincial elections as an opportunity to redress the imbalances created by their 2005 election boycott. Delayed elections will most acutely affect Sunnis not in government) particularly the Sahwa movement, who have made a strategic decision to participate in the planned elections.

[¶3.](#) (C) The perceived cause among Sunni Arabs for the elections delay, Kurdish aims vis-a-vis Kirkuk, feeds into a central Sunni rallying point of Kurdish overreach. Sunnis repeatedly tell us that the Kurds benefit disproportionately from the current political arrangement, and that pressure must be put on them to make concessions. The failure to launch a serious constitutional review process, as pledged to the Sunni Arab Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) in October 2005, also feeds this anger.

Election Delay Dampens Sunni Expectations

[¶4.](#) (C) In Anbar and Fallujah, the Sahwah movement is impatient to defeat the Iraqi Islamic Party, and has focused on elections. According to Anbar PRT, six months ago, Sahwa was pressing to change the provincial council composition (currently controlled by the IIP). However, as the parties sensed the approach of elections, Sahwa dropped its demand to re-form the PC and instead focused on winning the elections.

¶15. (C) Shaykh Ali Hatem told Anbar PRT August 7 that the failure to pass the law was "a move by the main power blocs to delay elections," and said the IIP is not truly representative of Iraqi Sunnis. He added that Iraq is not a true democracy if a select few can delay the people's right to elect their leadership. Hatem said that this has "aggravated the population and that the shaykhs are discussing options to take against the current Anbar PC." Shaykh Ali Hatem al-Sulayman al-Assafi, President of the Common Council of Iraqi Tribes and Hereditary Shaykh General of the Dulaym Confederation, told the PRT that: "We must now seek other means to re-apportion the council."

¶16. (C) In Sunni districts of Baghdad such as rural Zafaraniyah, tribal leaders have also focused on elections. In Baghdad's Jabour - Hawr Rajab) Adwaniyah area down through Siyafiyah, Sunni religious leaders have urged people to get out and vote, but postponement will add another stress point to a troubled area. Omar al-Jabouri, a Sunni Arab activist affiliated with a tribal group, told poloffs August 10 that the provincial elections delay is a major disappointment to tribal activists who want to field candidates. Similarly, in Salah ad-Din, indefinite postponement will be poorly received.

Kirkuk Issue Feeding Sunni Sense of Grievance

¶17. (C) Despite disappointment among many Sunnis over the delay, Sunni CoR members have tapped into a strong antipathy toward perceived Kurdish designs on Kirkuk. Saleh al-Mutlak, for example, leader of the National Iraqi Front in Parliament, has emerged as the champion of Arab interests in Kirkuk, and will seek to use his increased stature to gain additional political support.

BAGHDAD 00002520 002.2 OF 003

¶18. (C) On August 7, PRT Samarra obtained poll results in Salah ad-Din that indicated people welcomed the perceived blockage of Kurdish plans to annex Kirkuk, that the election law imbroglio had allegedly caused. Reinforcing this sentiment, Sunni tribal leaders held a peaceful march August 6 against the annexation of Kirkuk. And several Baghdad NGO contacts told the PRT August 7 that Iraqi Arabs feel that Kirkuk is an Arab city, and that the U.S. and UNAMI are biased toward the Kurds.

Delay Feeds Shi'a Detachment from Political Process

¶19. (C) While Shi'a contacts in government are unlikely to be seriously disappointed by the postponement, the delay will likely increase voter apathy and disengagement among the Shi'a populace, as voters perceive an attempt by unpopular incumbents to hold on to power. For example, the ISCI dominated leadership of Babel recognizes that it will likely lose seats to Sunni Arabs and Sadrists, and the Governor seems to recognize that his days are numbered.

¶10. (C) In Basrah, incumbent local politicians, notably Fadhila, are blamed for the slow reconstruction progress after the "Charge of the Knights" security operation, and many average Basrawis are disillusioned with the performance of the current politicians they elected.

¶11. (C) In Dhi Qar, contacts report that the populace wants to vote under safe conditions to choose a more representative council. Local officials, including ISCI Governor Aziz, appear less sure of their chances than they did several months ago, and are taking steps to appear more responsive to popular needs (including milking publicity from PRT and U.S. military projects and events).

¶12. (C) Many voters - and opposition parties - in Diwaniyah will view the delay as a ploy by ISCI to further solidify its grip on power before having to stand for re-election. In

predominantly Shi'a Karbala, delay will disappoint the local populace and undermine progress, convincing many that their hopes for a more effective and responsive provincial government are misplaced.

The View from the North

¶13. (C) In northern Iraq, reaction diverged along ethnic lines. The governor of Ninewa told PRT officers August 7 that the local population would not react violently, because "this is an issue that belongs to politicians." Meanwhile, Turkomen political leaders were critical of the Kurds, insisting that they should not be able to foist their views on all of Iraq, and expressing hope that the CoR will reach a compromise. Speaking with PRT Mosul on August 7, Turkomen Kirkuk PC member Zhala al-Nafitchi (ITF) criticized UNAMI head de Mistura, and called for his replacement by someone allegedly more neutral. He said the Turkomen want an elections law, but that Kirkuk should not join any region) it should have its own special status.

¶14. (C) Kirkuk PC Chairman Rizgar Ali told PRT officers August 7 that he was not surprised by the law's non-passage, and does not believe anything will happen until late September. He stressed that the Kurds want to implement Article 140 completely and want to form a multi-ethnic committee to vet census data before a Kirkuk voter list is finalized.

¶15. (C) In Erbil, Minister for Extra-Regional Affairs Mohammed Ihsan, told PRT officers that Tawafuq and other Sunni groups were behind the delay because they are determined to gain more time. He added that the Kurdish street is "totally fed up with Baghdad," and that this is causing them to lose faith in the Kurdish leadership due to a failure to effectively push the Kurdish agenda in Baghdad.

Baghdad: Delays Reinforce Dissatisfaction with Incumbents

¶16. (C) In discussions August 7, Baghdad PRTs heard general dissatisfaction with incumbent politicians, with sentiments mixed between those who want the opportunity to vote against incumbents and those who said provincial election delays will feed into popular detachment from the political process. A contact in Sadr City told PRT officers that people want the chance to vote for individuals rather than a party's list. Others said that the delay would benefit parties already in power, and that people were most concerned about electricity and security for their neighborhoods.

Comment

BAGHDAD 00002520 003.2 OF 003

¶17. (C) While this delay will reinforce popular disenchantment with incumbent politicians, who are largely blamed for the impasse; the delay most acutely affects Sunni Arabs who boycotted the 2005 elections. The comments by tribal leaders in Anbar, Fallujah and Salah ad-Din suggest that their commitment to the political process is not open-ended, and depends on the promise of elections within a reasonable time frame. However, while the political temperature may increase, we believe that most Sunnis will remain determined to join the system, rather than slide back into rejectionist or insurgent behavior. Sunnis have made a strategic decision to participate in the process and will wait until at least one more election cycle before reassessing that decision. For this reason, we will keep pressing the Iraqi political leadership in Baghdad to enact an election law promptly so that Iraq can hold provincial elections, preferably before the end of the year.

¶18. (C) We and our colleagues in the PRTs hear a fair amount

of dissatisfaction with incumbents, whether they be in provincial councils or in the national parliament. The political party leaders seem to sense it too. Hence, we believe that none of them is particularly anxious to move ahead with provincial elections quickly. In addition, many of them would be happier with a closed-list candidate system that would reinforce party leader authority and at the same time disadvantage independents, as occurred in the January and December 2005 elections. END COMMENT.
CROCKER